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Give Good Ideas
a Chance,
Come Whence
They May

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The internal purpose of this publication is to provide a Clearing House for secondary classical teachers in New York and vicinity or anywhere else; to afford an opportunity to younger classical scholars anywhere for the publication of their more modest endeavors along the line of original work, which might not otherwise see the light; to stimulate the teaching and quicken the student activity in the classical work in the high schools of Greater New York. The external purpose is to establish one or more College-entrance-scholarships for the most successful graduates from high schools in New York City, to be awarded on a competitive examination. The proceeds over and above expenses will be devoted to a scholarship fund. The labor involved is a labor of love.

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TRUSTEES OF THE SCHOLARSHIP FUND
ARTHUR S SOMERS, Central Board of Education

On Examinations

In Two Parts

PART II—PRACTICE

It would seem ridiculous to mention that perfect accuracy of expression is an absolute necessity in the framing of questions, were it not for the atrocious English seen too often, alas! in question papers set before our pupils. If the law holds good anywhere, that we should write so that the reader not only may understand, but must understand, surely it is imperative when the reader is a pupil, who will stand or fall by his right or wrong understanding of the question's meaning. A little care would change "Form an adverb from *felix* and compare it" to "Form an adverb from *felix* and compare that adverb", or, "Compare the adverb formed from *felix*". "Write a sentence illustrating each of the following" would better be stated "Illustrate each of the following by a sentence", or some pupil will go to pieces in the attempt to take the question at its word. There is no greater nuisance in this work than the distributive *each*. It always has to be handled with caution, or it will play some trick. Another source of trouble is the attempt to divide a question into sections. Some people invariably become confused when writing a question of this sort, and make "a" include "b", or "d" depend on "c", the result being a very loose, unsymmetrical arrangement. Take, for example, the question, "State (a) the manner of forming the active periphrastic conjugation, (b) its meaning, (c) illustrate". Not only is this arrangement poor, but there is no need of dividing the question into sections at all. It

should read: "Explain and illustrate the formation and the meaning of the active periphrastic conjugation". Often the subdivision of a question is necessary to make it clear. The division should then be carefully done. For instance, this question, "Give (a) time and place of Cicero's birth, (b) an account of his education, (c) sketch his political career, (d) relate the circumstances connected with his death", should be subdivided, it is true, but not just in this way. It might be reshaped thus: "Sketch the life of Cicero, covering (a) time and place of birth, (b) education, (c) political career, (d) circumstances connected with his death." That part of the question on which the subdivisions depend should always precede them; no part of it should follow. A very bad arrangement, for instance, would be the following: "Give an account of (a) the early life, (b) the political career, of Cicero". A little uniformity, too, in the statement of questions is not at all a bad thing. Why should one say at one time "Put into Latin", and at another "Translate into Latin", or ask the pupil in question 3 to "translate into English", and in question 8 to "translate into idiomatic English"? These things may seem mere minor details, but a little care and attention with regard to them may save a paper from appearing slovenly, amateurish, not to say unscholarly. Teachers require similar care on the part of pupils, and certainly should not spare it in their own work.

Every paper, before it is given to the pupils, should be thoroughly tested to see if it asks any impossibilities, such as the declension in the plural of some noun found only in the singular, or the translation, in a passage, of some words that the pupils have never seen. In a Cæsar examination that I once saw, the teacher had selected, quite at haphazard, a portion of the passage set for translation into English, with the direction to change it to direct discourse. He did not stop to reflect that the portion selected commenced in the middle of a sentence, and, worse still, that there were two verbs of saying, both of which were inside of the indirect quotation. Imagine the confusion of a Cæsar class at being called upon to unravel that. Upon correcting

the papers, the teacher found, what he should have known before giving the examination, that he was barely able to answer the question himself; and it took some pretty clever wriggling to avoid losing caste in the eyes of the class.

Every question should have a definite aim. The particular bit of knowledge that he wishes to call forth should be the first thing in the teacher's mind, and he should then so state his question that nothing else will answer it. He will not then put himself in the position of having to decide what he will accept and what he will not. The drawing of the line in such cases is always hard, and generally causes some friction. A case in point is the following: In a certain examination in civics, the question was asked, "Into what classes are the cities of this State divided?" Most of the candidates answered, "First, second, and third classes". Now, that was not just the answer that the examiner expected, but he had to accept it. Next time he stated his question like this: "State the basis of classification of the cities of this State". The answer in many cases was, "Population". Same result. The third time, that examiner had learned his lesson. He asked: "Give in substance the provisions of the New York State constitution with regard to the classification of cities". This time he got what he was looking for, or, if not, he could discount with perfect justice. It is well to avoid such expressions as "Give arguments to show", or "Give examples". Two arguments or two examples will answer such questions as well as ten, and the shrewd pupil will see this, while some conscientious plodder will waste his time telling all he knows, and get no more credit for all his pains. Candidates will be more at ease, and better results will follow, if questions call for *two* arguments or *three* results, etc. Some questions are framed so that pupils can do what newspaper men call "padding". Questions like "Write on Cæsar as a soldier" can often be answered by a pupil with very little knowledge, some assurance and a ready use of English, so as to receive at least half credit from the unwary teacher.

There are other ways of presenting pupils with credits. One is to ask questions the answers to which can be found on the paper. Another is to allow two or more questions to be answered, wholly or in part, by the same bit of knowledge. When calling for the principal parts of a verb, for instance, it is well to

see whether some or all of them do not occur in the passage set for translation. It is giving away credits to ask for the conjugation of *utor* in the imperfect subjunctive, when the form *uteretur* is to be found anywhere on the paper. I remember an examination in French that called for the names of ten celebrated French authors and one work of each. The author of the paper did not notice that seven noted French works, with their authors, were mentioned in various places on that very paper; but most of the pupils saw it, and obtained seven free credits therefrom. The insertion in this question of the words "not found on this paper" would have obviated the difficulty. It is allowing the same knowledge to answer two questions, to call for the translation into Latin of a set English sentence containing a clause of purpose, and in another part of the same paper to ask, "Describe and illustrate one way of expressing purpose in Latin".

It is usually well to bestow some attention upon the proper apportionment of credits. In an examination where each question receives 10 per cent, why should one question call for the declension* of two nouns, each counting five credits, and another question call for five nouns, each counting two credits? In such a case it is perfectly possible for two pupils, each knowing five of the seven nouns, to receive, one ten and the other sixteen out of a possible twenty credits. This would be an important matter if the passing of the paper depended on it. I believe that it is impossible to apportion the credits on a paper with perfect justice; but a little care in this regard will do much toward saving an examination from the charge of unfairness.

Every paper, before being given to the class, should be carefully edited to correct typographical errors or mistakes in punctuation. Otherwise the correction must be made during the progress of the examination, when there is danger of inadvertently giving away some information.

The observance of such points as are suggested in the present paper will make all the difference between a good examination and a poor one; and nowhere is it truer than in the making of question papers that eternal vigilance is the price of success.

MARY RANSOM FITZPATRICK

* A question calling for the full declension of a noun or an adjective would, in our judgment, be too elementary for an examination of any importance.—EDS.